



Legislative
Services Agency

FINAL REPORT

Mass Transit Study Committee

January 2009

MEMBERS

Senator Matt McCoy, Co-chairperson
Senator Daryl Beall
Senator Larry L. Noble

Representative Beth Wessel-Kroeschell,
Co-chairperson
Representative Mary Gaskill
Representative Dan Huseman

Staff Contacts:

Tim McDermott, Senior Legal
Counsel, (515) 281-8090,
timothy.mcdermott@legis.state.ia.us

Amanda Knief, Legal Counsel,
(515) 281-6048,
amanda.knief@legis.state.ia.us

Contents:

- I. Committee Proceedings
- II. Department of Transportation (DOT)
- III. Former and Current Mass Transit Administrators
- IV. Rail Service
- V. Iowa Public Policy Center
- VI. Department of Elder Affairs (DEA)
- VII. Iowa Office of Energy Independence (OEI)
- VIII. Committee Recommendations
- IX. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency

AUTHORIZATION AND APPOINTMENT

The Mass Transit Study Committee was established by the Legislative Council and charged to “study the ways in which mass transit might be employed to provide public transportation services among Iowa communities. Consider the ways mass transit availability affects various populations in rural and urban communities, particularly those who are unable to drive or cannot afford to own a motor vehicle; determine any impact mass transit within communities can have on population levels, quality of life, and economic development in urban job centers, small and satellite communities, and rural towns; identify the effect of mass transit on greenhouse gases and on overall air quality; determine the level of public need for mass transit, including any specific areas in immediate need; investigate the feasibility of expanding mass transit services and the types and combination of services that might comprise a state mass transit system; identify potential costs and funding mechanisms for developing and maintaining specific mass transit services; and assess the attitudes and habits of Iowans concerning personal transportation and ways to educate the public about the economic, social, and environmental advantages of mass transit. Consult with the interests listed in 2008 Iowa Acts, S.F. 2425, § 146, in conducting the study.”



Mass Transit Study Committee

I. Committee Proceedings

The Committee was authorized to conduct one meeting during the 2008 Legislative Interim. The Committee met on Friday, November 14, 2008, in Room 22 of the State Capitol.

II. Department of Transportation (DOT)

Mr. Neil Volmer, Mr. Peter Hallock, Ms. Tamara Nicholson, and Mr. Stuart Anderson of DOT, testified. Mr. Volmer reviewed the duties and schedule of the TIME-21 Public Transit Funding Study. He identified the types of transit available in the state and the number of rides and revenue miles for large urban, small urban, and regional transit systems during a one-year period. Mr. Volmer identified the average portion of local, state, and federal transit funding received by large urban, small urban, and regional transit systems. Sources of funding were addressed for transit infrastructure and vehicles and the transit funding challenges in the future on the local, state, and federal levels. He also identified issues relating to the adequacy of transit services in the state. Mr. Volmer provided information relating to transit funding in other states in the Midwest region.

Ms. Nicholson discussed the existing Amtrak long-distance network as well as the state's long-range transportation plan for Iowa's passenger rail system. Ms. Nicholson discussed the Amtrak feasibility studies for passenger rail service from Chicago to Dubuque, from Chicago to the Quad Cities, and from the Quad Cities to Iowa City. DOT is developing a proposed passenger rail funding program for Iowa for the 2009 Legislative Session.

III. Former and Current Mass Transit Administrators

Three current and former administrators for transit authorities in Iowa testified.

- Mr. Bob Bourne, the former 25-year administrator of CyRide in Ames, testified regarding the many successes of CyRide and other transit success stories around the state. Mr. Bourne addressed the difficulties of intercity transit service, including the reluctance of cities to provide the service, and stated that establishing such services requires creative thinking and identifying natural city pairs such as Des Moines and Ames.
- Mr. Brad Miller, General Manager, Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority, discussed the benefits of regional transit districts under Iowa Code Chapter 28M, including the independent taxing authority. Mr. Miller stated that transit infrastructure is significantly underfunded, that ridership is increasing, that costs are increasing, and that the funding is flat or declining. Mr. Miller stated that an investment in transit can provide economic stimulus, help reduce the transportation costs for families, improve mobility for the aging population, improve the environment, improve traffic congestion, provide vibrant downtowns, and provide university communities with a competitive advantage.
- Ms. Pam Ward, Transit Administrator, Ottumwa Transit Authority, discussed the increasing transit costs and declining state transit assistance and the effects of increasing demand and ridership. She discussed the significant vehicle infrastructure cost and the stress such costs put on a transit agency.



IV. Rail Service

Mr. Kevin Brubaker, Deputy Director, Environmental Law and Policy Center, testified regarding passenger rail service in Illinois and Iowa. An Amtrak feasibility study has been completed for Chicago-Quad Cities-Iowa City, and a feasibility study for an extension to Des Moines will be completed next year. The estimated cost for the extension of Amtrak to Iowa City is reasonable, and Mr. Brubaker encouraged the General Assembly to pursue expanded passenger rail service in Iowa.

V. Iowa Public Policy Center

Mr. John Fuller, Professor, University of Iowa, Iowa Public Policy Center, testified regarding increasing intercity transit through private intercity busing, existing regional services, and Amtrak. He testified that land use changes will likely be necessary for producing greater urban density if urban transit is going to offer more services. Mr. Fuller stated that public transportation vehicles must be filled with passengers in order to have a significant impact on fuel use and greenhouse gases. Mr. Fuller urged caution when considering demand and cost estimates for public transportation projects and suggested increasing the sales tax on gasoline to financially support public transit in Iowa.

VI. Department of Elder Affairs (DEA)

Mr. John McCalley, Director, DEA, testified regarding unmet service needs for elderly Iowans as reported to the department by the 13 area agencies on aging. The unmet needs were due to no funding or inadequate funding and did not reflect instances where service providers were unavailable. Mr. McCalley suggested that \$1.1 million is needed to cover the unmet needs.

VII. Iowa Office of Energy Independence (OEI)

Ms. Jennifer Wright, Deputy Director, OEI, discussed the economic and environmental impacts of decreasing the amount of vehicle miles traveled. She stated that mass transit is part of the Iowa Energy Independence Plan. Ms. Wright identified the challenges to transit and energy as the increasing costs to maintain infrastructure, the costs to develop new or redesign current infrastructure, prioritizing environmental and economic viability, and promoting collaboration between communities to implement change.

VIII. Committee Recommendations

The Committee adopted the following recommendations:

1. The General Assembly and the DOT should adopt a resolution notifying Iowa's Congressional delegation that passenger rail service in Iowa is of significant importance and that passenger rail opportunities with the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Initiative and the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative should be pursued.
2. Within the current tight budgetary climate, the General Assembly should explore all possible funding mechanisms for public transit including but not limited to the use tax, bond issuances, and public/private partnerships.



Mass Transit Study Committee

3. The General Assembly should consider adopting incentives to increase ridership and explore specific programs which would be designed to benefit low-income lowans, disabled lowans, the aging population in Iowa, and veterans in Iowa.
4. The General Assembly should encourage community-to-community public transit access by exploring private/public partnerships to share public transit service and ensure public access. Such service should be affordable, regularly and frequently scheduled transportation, and should include regional systems across Iowa.
5. The General Assembly should create a capital matching fund to maximize local, state, and federal investment for the purchase of vehicles and infrastructure to promote public transit.
6. The General Assembly should encourage the reduction of the state's carbon footprint and reliance on foreign oil by reducing vehicle miles traveled through the use of public transit.
7. The General Assembly should promote urban density and land-use planning to reduce vehicle miles traveled.
8. The General Assembly should continue the Mass Transit Study Committee during the 2009 interim period for purposes of reviewing the December 2009 report of the TIME-21 Public Transit Funding Study and the recommendations adopted by the Mass Transit Study Committee in this report.

IX. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency

The following materials listed were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are filed with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the <Additional Information> link on the Committee's Internet webpage.

<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/aspx/Committees/Committee.aspx?id=240>

1. Committee Proposed Rules.
2. Iowa State Railroad Map, DOT.
3. Iowa Railroad Service Map, 2007, DOT.
4. Iowa Grain Facilities Map, DOT.
5. Iowa Biodiesel and Ethanol Processing Plant, July 2007, DOT.
6. Chronology of Iowa Railroad Abandonments Map, DOT.
7. Iowa Railroad Traffic Density, 2006, DOT.
8. "Railroads Are on Track," DOT.
9. "Iowa's Railroads and You," DOT.
10. "Need Answers?" DOT.
11. "Iowa Rail Transportation FACTS," DOT.



12. Letter to Co-chairperson McCoy from Angela Connolly, Polk County Board of Supervisors.
13. Letter to Co-chairpersons from Ted Brackett, Assistant Vice President, Corporate Real Estate at Principal Financial Group.
14. Letter to Co-chairpersons from Timothy J. Burget, Mayor of Altoona.
15. Letter to Co-chairpersons from T.M. Franklin Cownie, Mayor, and Richard A. Clark, City Manager, of Des Moines.
16. Letter to Co-chairpersons from Warren R. Madden, Vice President for Business and Finance, Iowa State University.
17. Letter to Co-chairperson McCoy from Molly Kottmeyer, Legislative Liaison, Department of Human Services.
18. PowerPoint presentation by Office of Public Transit, DOT.
19. PowerPoint presentation by Bourne Transit Consulting, LLC.
20. Passenger Rail Information, Office of Rail Transportation, DOT.
21. "The Benefits of Public Transportation: Expanding the Transportation Options in an Aging Society."
22. "The Benefits of Public Transportation: Essential Support for a Strong Economy."
23. PowerPoint presentation by DART.
24. PowerPoint presentation by Ottumwa Transit Authority.
25. Passenger Rail for Iowa: A Briefing for the Iowa Mass Transit Study Committee, Environmental Law and Policy Center.
26. Intercity Passenger Transport for Iowa? by Professor Fuller, University of Iowa.
27. Case Management Program for Frail Elders Fiscal Fact Sheet (CMPFE), DEA.
28. CMPFE Transportation and Assisted Transportation Unmet Needs by County and Reasons, DEA.
29. Definitional Sheet, DEA.
30. Mass Transit in Iowa's Energy Economy, OEI.
31. Service, Finance and Operating Characteristics of State-Supported Amtrak Trains, September 2008, Amtrak Governmental Affairs.